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# EDWARD HOPPER

BY

GUY PÈNE DU BOIS



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These volumes will appear in 1932.*

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## FOREWORD

*THIS book is one of a series devoted to the work of various American artists and is published by the Whitney Museum of American Art, founded by Gertrude V. Whitney. The purpose of these books, like that of the Museum which sponsors them, is to promote a wider knowledge and appreciation of the best in American art.*

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JULIANA R. FORCE, Director  
Whitney Museum of American Art



Photograph by Soichi Sunami

EDWARD HOPPER

# EDWARD HOPPER

BY

GUY PÈNE DU BOIS

IN Barbey d'Aurévilly's book on Beau Brummel he attributes the success of the dandy to his refusal to permit his individuality or, as this turned out to be, his leadership to affect anarchistic airs or to wander, as this must certainly mean, into completely new fields. The dandy must borrow from the aristocrat, show by obvious references that he has ancestors and that they have prompted the basic design of his clothes and manners. While the aristocrat greatly resembles his antithesis the anarchist; his practice and theory can have nothing in common with the other's. His elevation has been accomplished stone upon stone with the foundations of society, of that society which the other seeks to demolish. The aristocrat must be a traditionalist.

Now in Anglo-Saxon society—to continue the retelling of the already well known—the ideal of liberty considers the common weal more than any other factor of that myth—liberty. It is constructed on a sound business basis or on the solid man's realization of the comparative nature of liberty. It arrives at giving a certain amount of liberty to the many and with its always so handsomely steady and sound progression creates a common way of thinking among those enjoying this liberty, which is, after all, the proud product of their own concerted action. "In union there is strength."

Successful concert in action is always certain to be followed by regimentation and regimentation (I wish I could think of another word) by hatred of the flourish, an errant accident as insane as you like, which waves its groundless elation, the flash of a sentimental and useless sword, in the face of all common sense and decency.

The Beau's philosophy may be summed up in one sentence: It must

substantially be the cravat in common use, smaller or larger by a fraction, a telling fraction, and tied a little differently, but not too differently. He was the most English of English artists: a nationalist who could never, as English painters have so often, bring himself to resemble a mountebank or, which is the same thing on those little islands, a foreigner.

It is a great temptation to declare Edward Hopper the most inherently Anglo-Saxon painter of all times. This must of course be done with an accent upon the Anglo-Saxon's capability for Puritanism. The others of his inclination have been too valiantly fighting against the windmill of native reticence. They have played down to the sentimentality which is sure to rage behind any consistent reserve or they have battled against this reserve with contrary extravagance, borrowed, with too little instinctive conviction, from freer Latin countries. Hopper denies none of the Anglo-Saxon attributes which are so strongly planted in his character. He has built an aesthetic which expresses them directly. He has turned the Puritan in him into a purist, turned moral rigours into stylistic precisions.

Ingres and David with a few other Frenchmen, the Classicists particularly, did the equivalent to this with the type of Puritanism, looking contemptuously upon the looseness and wickedness of Paris, which is manifested so strongly in the greater part of France. Flesh with these men is very close to the bone. It must be as hard, as Delacroix said of Ingres' painted flesh, as leather. In America since the advent of the Freud inspired demand for sensuality in life and art, Puritanism has been more generally derided than ever and a good many painters led away from it into byways where they must, because of temperamental exigencies, be lost. Hopper in direct contradiction to these weaklings is so deaf to all faddish chatter that he can, without strain, with no stunting exercise of will, remain himself. Indeed life has never changed for him from the originally simple fact which he first viewed although the vision has en-

larged. He has never stopped, to use an example of very minor importance, preferring to portray houses and steam engines to men. He has perhaps erred a little in his terrific desire to simplify, for, with him, it becomes a simplification of the already rudimentarily simple. Perhaps he has felt this himself. In any case he told me the other day that it had taken him years to bring himself into the painting of a cloud in the sky. He bought a lace collar from his wife, she told me, so that she would no longer wear it. (The exchange was not made in money.) His hatred of the purely decorative is notorious. And yet he will, as in the painting of that Victorian house by the railroad track, not belie existing fact. His work in this sense is in no way subjective. He is an interpreter and not an inventor of forms. Can any one be?

His compositions are built, for the most part, in straight lines bare of fuzz, of any fanciful additions to structural integrity. I have never known a man who could with more sincerity or more convincingly say that conversation was too much made up of utterances, not worth the physical bother required to produce them. He will never himself, in conversation, bother to fill in awkward moments, to slide over stops in thought. This refusal to compromise for social reasons when carried into paint creates many barren moments in his canvases, moments which a more worldly or less strictly honest painter would pad. His honesties carry considerable brutality with them. His cannot be called a social spirit. In both person and work his statements are apt to have a too unadulterated boldness, a shocking want of pliability, of ease.

His assurance seems formidable. I sometimes wonder whether it is. He often wages a losing war against fact, becomes, for all the tremendous power of his personality, a prey to the literal. This will be seen particularly in some water colors of New England houses which, in their lack of creative activity, of human warmth, are as empty or emptier than those of very ordinary painters. There are one or two in this vein which remind of pale architectural renditions. But then in this case, as in all,

the failures are the key to the successes. Hopper's followers, already a great many, using this so purely individual method of his, will arrive only at repeating the failures. A repetition of the *South Truro Church*, for an example, or of the *House by Railroad* or of the *Écluse de Monnaie*, done in the earlier, lighter and more lyrical Paris period, by any other man is incredible. Their shell does not give the cue to the power contained within them, to the expressive force with which they are laden.

His stylistic precision is actuated much more by instinct than by intellect. His seemingly so deliberate omissions, as I have already suggested, are due to a positive hatred rather than to any cerebral motivation. Considerable fear of the flourish is in everything he does; a fear, he might call it, of the ridiculous. As an example, he told me one day, in a confidence which I am now breaking, of a session he had just had with his tailor. He had gone to him with the intention of ordering a gay suit of clothes, "something cheerful and of fashionable cut." To the tailor's "conservative as usual, sir?" he had found himself replying "Yes." The gay suit has never been made to my knowledge. It would not suit him in any case. But he must take out of his pictures, in this way, many fancies suggested by errant impulse, fancies that so many Anglo-Saxon painters forced into theirs in defiance of the native detestation of them. Anglo-Saxon art is thus largely a product of reaction, drawn in stubborn denial of instinct on the reverse or wrong side of the slate. It is for this reason that Hopper seems to me to be the first of the Anglo-Saxon painters to have remained in the groove made for them by tradition. He, in any case, replies directly, with not a shade of innuendo, to the demands made upon him by his nature. Perhaps I have insisted too much on this point. I do not know. It seems to me of supreme importance.

I am tempted to take one of his pictures as an example of the qualities in the rest. This is the *Hills South Truro*, as economic in title as most of those he writes, and as complete an expression of the fullness and warmth with which he fills his good pictures as will be found in any of

those which he has exhibited in the last seven or eight years. It may be interesting to note here that he has painted only thirty oils in that time. The *Hills, South Truro* is, to me, one of the most dignified American landscapes and one of the purest pieces of landscape painting that has been done here in recent years. In explanation of this latter statement it would be well to remember that most landscape painting of the day is completely subjective, a compilation of memories ordered to express a mood. Hopper's only comment on this picture to me was that "the mosquitoes were terrible" on the day he painted it. It was done almost entirely on the spot. It shows a railroad track, a very incidental house, and a range of hills behind. Its order, measure and proportion, to revert to the Greek term, give it a simple and profound majesty and with that sense of never going beyond the truth, so eminent in all of his works, one, to the observer, of complete satisfaction. This will require more explanation. Our reactions to pictures differ so greatly. Only a few leave us at peace. (I am talking now, naturally, of good canvases.) A great many arouse emotions usually dormant and leave the others untouched. We are led to think of beauty of color or of line or form, to think of paint rather than of nature. The *Hills, South Truro* brings us back to those moments, they are rare enough, when we have felt the presence of some power beyond our strength, of that cosmic order or harmony existing beyond the chaos of our little lives.

We are in a period more completely ruled by Paris than any in the past. Our galleries are largely given over to Parisian painters or to American imitations of them. We have carried our Colonial habit of love for European products to an extravagantly ridiculous place. It is time we began examining these products and comparing them with those of our own which have been done beyond the influence of the momentary fashionable sway. Hopper is among the first of the latter group worthy of analysis. He is a painter who will make many painters of the past or of the present, European or American, seem trivial. He will make them

seem as though they were too romantic or sentimental or flowery. He will make a very great many seem too garrulous or too talkative or too wasteful. He will make many of the "great" moderns seem like funny little reciters of fairy tales, of extravagances built to put a light in the eyes of jaded little children. He will be shown, in any comparison of this kind, without patience for trivialities, a serious man, capable of reaching majesty: a male, if you like; certainly an Anglo-Saxon.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

EDWARD HOPPER was born July 22, 1882, at Nyack, New York, of American parentage of families of English and Dutch origin, who had lived for many generations in America. He studied at the Chase School (New York School of Art) under Robert Henri and Kenneth Hayes Miller, going later to Europe where he worked independently. His work is produced chiefly in New York City and on the New England coast. He exhibited at the first Independent exhibition held in New York with a group composed of Rockwell Kent, Guy Pène du Bois, George Bellows, Glenn Coleman, Arnold Friedman, Homer Boss, Julius Golz and others. A few years later, in 1913, he exhibited at the "Armory Show." His first one-man exhibition took place at the Whitney Studio Club. His work has been shown in many important national and international exhibitions and has received various honors. He is represented by paintings and etchings in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, N. Y.; British Museum, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, D. C.; Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago Art Institute; Brooklyn Museum; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.; Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; Delgado Museum, New Orleans, La.; New York Public Library; California State Library, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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- "Charles Burchfield, American," *The Arts*, July, 1928—v. 14, pp. 5-12.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

HOTEL ROOM, 1931  
h. 60 inches w. 65 inches



EARLY SUNDAY MORNING, 1930

h. 60 inches w.  $35\frac{1}{8}$  inches

*Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art*



HILLS AT SOUTH TRURO, 1930

h. 27 inches w. 43 inches



TABLES FOR LADIES, 1930

H. 48 inches    W. 60 inches

*Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York*



SOUTH TRURO CHURCH. 1930

H. 29 inches    W. 43 inches

*Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Tucker*

*New York*



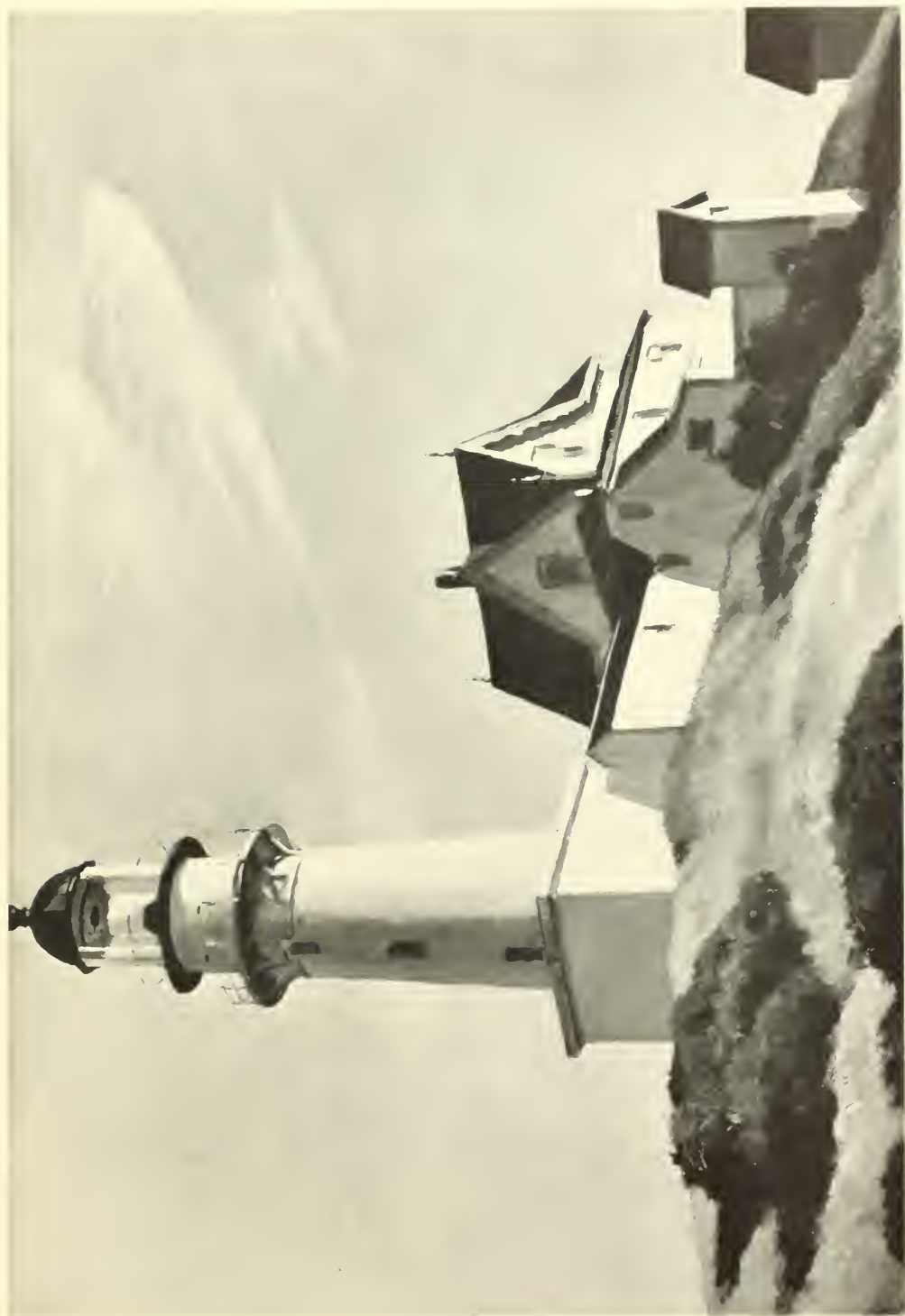
CHOP SUEY, 1929  
H. 32 inches    W. 38 inches



LIGHTHOUSE AT TWO LIGHTS, 1929

h. 29 inches w. 43 inches

*Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Tucker  
New York*



BLACKWELL'S ISLAND, 1928

H. 35 inches    W. 60 inches

*Collection of Mr. William G. Russel Allen  
Boston, Mass.*



ELEVEN A. M., 1928

H. 28 inches    W. 36 inches

*Collection of Mr. Frank K. M. Rehn*  
*New York*



WILLIAMSBURGH BRIDGE. 1928

h. 29 inches w. 43 inches

*Collection of Mr. Frank K. M. Rehn  
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CAPE ANN GRANITE. 1928

H. 28 inches    W. 40 inches

*Collection of Mr. D. H. Diblee*

*Ross, California*



CAPTAIN ED STAPLES, 1928

h. 28 inches w. 36 inches

*Collection of Mr. Frank K. M. Rehn  
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ADAMS'S HOUSE (*Water Color*), 1928

h. 16 inches w. 25 inches

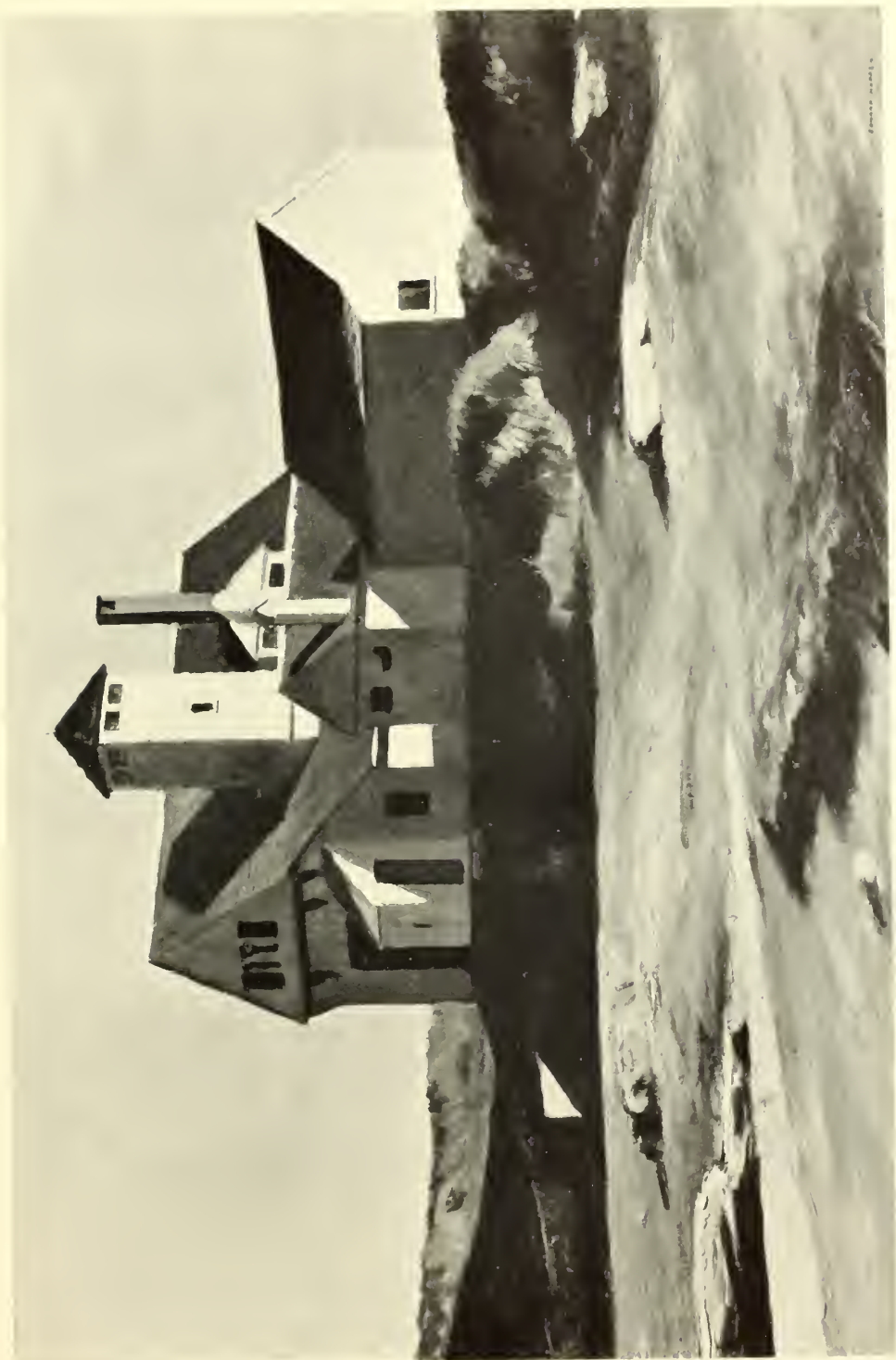
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NIGHT WINDOWS. 1928  
h. 25 inches w. 30 inches



COAST GUARD STATION, 1927  
h. 29 inches w. 43 inches



TWO ON THE AISLE, 1927

h. 36 inches w. 48 inches

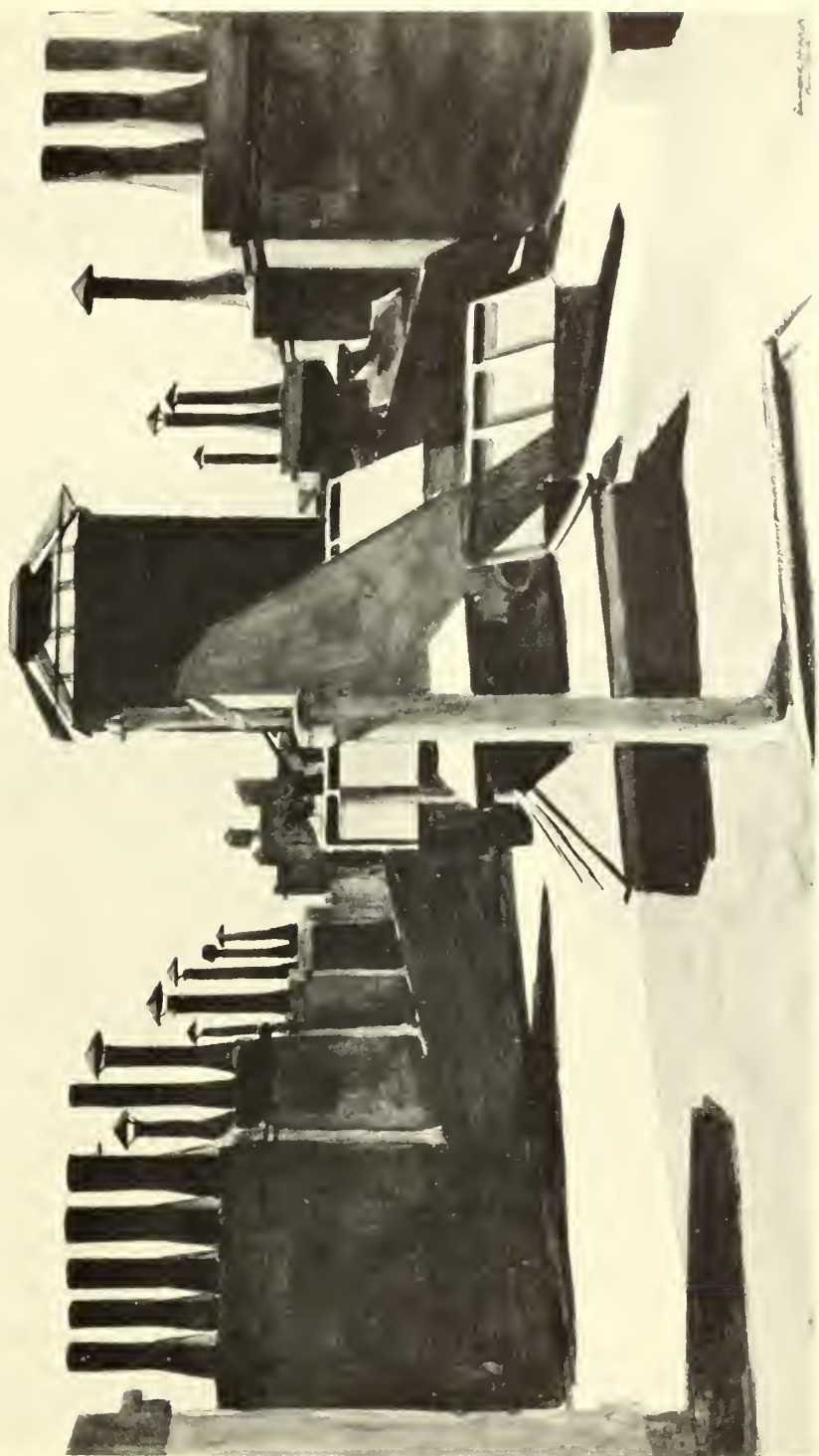
*Collection of Mr. Carl W. Hamilton  
New York*



ROOFS OF WASHINGTON SQUARE, 1926  
(*Water Color*)

H. 14 inches    W. 20 inches

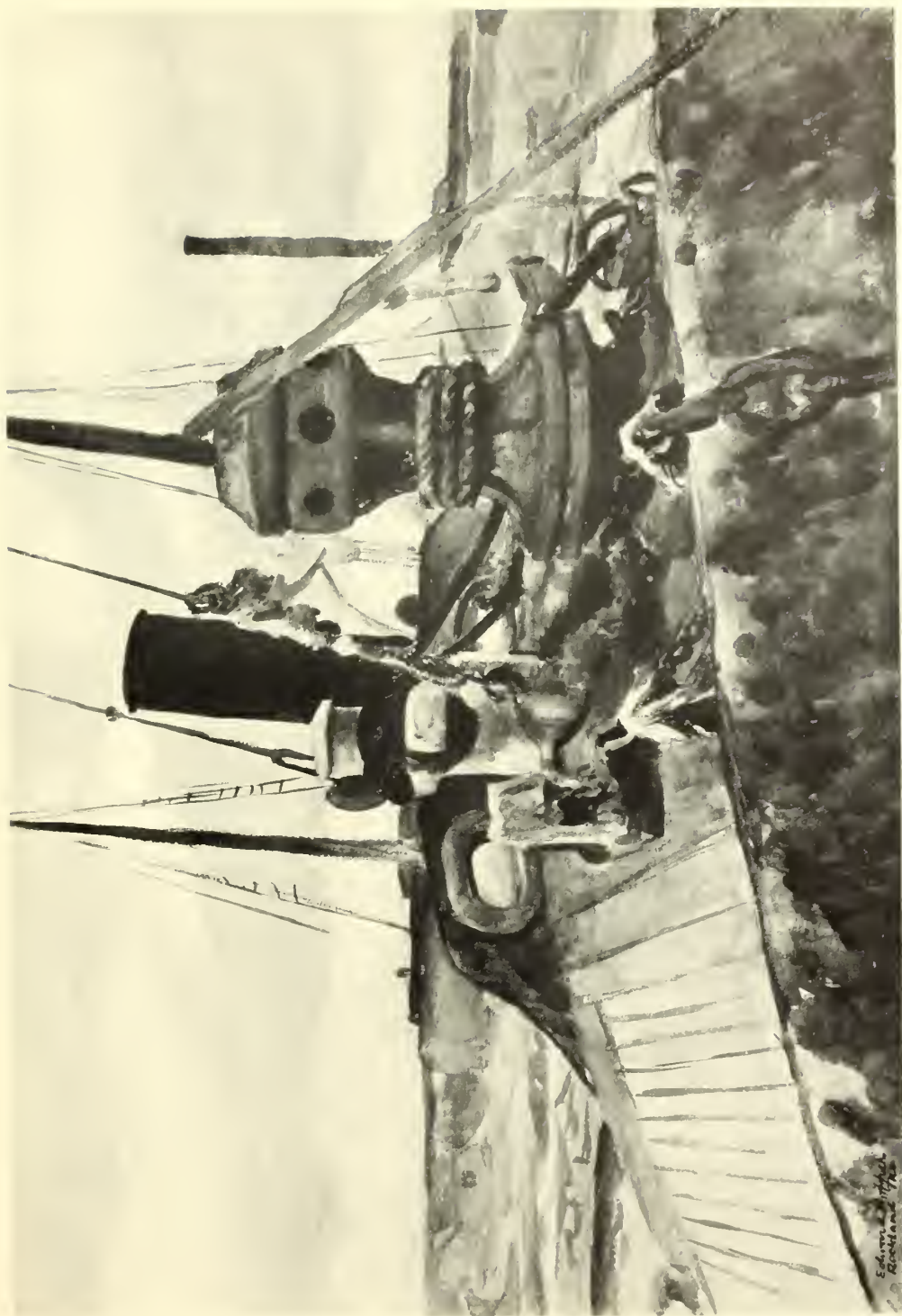
*Collection of Mr. Frank K. M. Rehn*



BOW OF BEAM TRAWLER WIDGEON, 1926  
(*Water Color*)

h. 14 inches w. 20 inches

*Collection of Mrs. John Osgood Blanchard  
New York*



Edwards & Tappan  
Portland, Me.

HASKELL'S HOUSE (Water Color). 1924

h.  $13\frac{1}{2}$  inches w.  $19\frac{1}{2}$  inches

*Collection of Emma Bellows, New York*



HOUSES OF 'SQUAM LIGHT, 1923  
(*Water Color*)

h.  $11\frac{3}{4}$  inches w. 18 inches

*Collection of Mr. John T. Spaulding  
Boston, Mass.*



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